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"निरन्तर शिक्षाका लागि पुस्तकालय"

SOUVENIR

17th LIBRARY DAY

2024

स्मारिका

सत्रौं पुस्तकालय दिवस

२०८१

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प्रकाशक

सत्रौं पुस्तकालय दिवस मूल आयोजक समिति

शिक्षा, विज्ञान तथा प्रविधि मन्त्रालय

Libraries for Generations

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Background

In the contemporary context, the relevance and appropriateness of libraries have become subjects of discussion on various platforms, including social media. The scenario has emerged where the concepts of Open Educational Resources, e-resources, e-libraries, and virtual libraries need to be vigorously developed, centering on constructing libraries as technology-oriented institutions and propagating a culture of reading across generations. Against this backdrop, it becomes imperative to shed light on the interrelatedness of reading culture, libraries, and intergenerational knowledge transfer. The present article on **"Libraries for Generations"** attempts to explore the historical aspect of libraries and briefly discuss knowledge dissemination and the application of technology.

Introduction

Human civilization, having evolved from the Stone Age toward advanced social organizations, is found to have grown intellectually more potent and talented. Humans, considered the most conscious beings among animals, have been systematically transferring language, culture, practices, and traditions from one generation to the next, paralleling their intellectual development. The pattern has been to acquire knowledge from life's experiences and achievements, initiate novel experiments based on that knowledge, progress towards further experimentation driven by successes, contemplate failures by ingraining experiences and realizations in the psyche, recollect them for the future, or record them in various forms. Such lived experiences or learning, having evolved, took the form of books. The extensive collection and management of these books according to established principles led to the emergence of repositories or archives, which in contemporary times have become known as libraries (Manguel, 1996; Polastron, 2007, Smarika. 2077).

The term '*Pustakalaya*' (Library) is derived from the Sanskrit words '*pustaka*' and '*alaya*', formed by their composite union. Literally, 'library' means the house or repository of books. The *Prajña Nepali Brihat Shabdakosh* (a comprehensive Nepali dictionary) defines a library as "a place or building where collections of books on various subjects are kept for interested readers to access under certain conditions" (Prajña Brihat Shabdakosh, 2080). Sanskrit grammar texts like *Shabdakalpadruma* and *Amarakosha* also interpret '*pustakālaya*' as a repository of books. A library is an educational center that systematically selects, collects, and manages a multidimensional array of textual and audio-visual materials from various eras and creators, encompassing sciences, commerce, literature, philosophy, religion, arts, information technology, and more. These include books, cassettes, CDs, DVDs, microfilms, software, records, copper plates, palm-leaf manuscripts,

bhojapatra (bark manuscripts), *pandulipis* (handwritten manuscripts), manuscript illustrations, inscriptions, and modern and traditional text and multimedia resources (Smarika, 2077, p. 37). A library can be defined as an information center that selects, collects, manages, and disseminates textual and audio-visual materials across subjects as per reader needs (Smarika, 2077, p. 38). Highlighting the significance of libraries, the English poet Carlyle remarked, "*The true university of these days is a collection of books*" (quote from social media).

Historical Evolution

The historical development of libraries is considered to predate the origin of books themselves. The informal beginnings of libraries can be traced back to the Jews preserving the Bible on sheepskin and tree bark around 5500 BCE, even before the birth of Jesus Christ, and the Sumerians and Mesopotamians inventing cuneiform script and recording it on wet clay tablets (Smarika, 2077, p. 37). The Chinese civilization has evidence of Chinese characters etched onto turtle shells, referred to as Ch'ya ku wen (Sarkar, 2079, p. a). During excavations of the Indus Valley Civilization sites like Mohenjo-Daro, numerous clay seals were discovered, including a 2100–1700 BCE seal depicting a human figure with three faces, hands spread in a yoga posture, an erect phallus, a pointed crown, surrounded by animals like elephants, tigers, buffalo (Khanal, 2080, p. 1). Such prehistoric archaeological findings – ranging from seals, anthropomorphic figures, yoni-ling worship symbols, stone tools, cave paintings – hint at the rudimentary forms of knowledge preservation that preceded modern libraries. While these explorations provide initial insights into libraries' origins, more robust archaeological studies could yield further concrete evidence.

In Nepal, ample evidence of the establishment and development of libraries is yet to be found. However, studies of various textual materials from ancient times undoubtedly indicate a deep-rooted culture of reading and library traditions. Scholars have described the Nepali cultural sphere as an open library, where tangible and intangible cultural elements have been transmitted intergenerationally through lived experiences. This informal, traditional mode of knowledge preservation can be considered an embodiment of library culture. Social rituals and lifestyles integrated the essence of libraries as a cultural phenomenon, imparting the knowledge necessary for sustenance (based on conversations with senior culturologist Dr. Jagaman Gurung).

Within the Newar community of Kathmandu Valley, certain groups are associated with specific rituals, while others are linked to various production or service sectors, ensuring employment opportunities for all without encroaching on each other's domains. Production, skills, and services are intertwined with rituals. Each community hones its expertise from birth, becoming proficient (Munkarmi, 2079, p. 108-109). This exemplifies the intangible library culture, elucidating its practical utility. Economically privileged segments of society had direct access to formal education and educational materials, while the underprivileged and middle classes acquired knowledge informally through oral traditions and practical applications, transmitted across generations. For instance, the Swasthani Vrata Katha (a Hindu ritual narration) enabled those without direct access to education to imbibe its teachings by integrating it with religion and rituals. Even those unfamiliar with the script, especially women, could acquire knowledge through this cultural practice (Sharma, 2079,

p. 117).

Ancient and Medieval Libraries

During the ancient and medieval periods, the waves of education emanating from the renowned centers of learning like *Takshashila, Vikramshila, Nalanda,* and *Pataliputra* in neighboring India must have influenced the educational landscape, book culture, and library traditions in Nepal as well. The Malla period can be considered a significant era in Nepal's library development. The Malla kings had attained proficiency in disciplines like tantra, astrology, music, architecture, and their keen interest, writing, collection, and study of texts in these fields directly linked them to library culture. Historical accounts suggest that the library in ancient Bhaktapur housed around fourteen thousand books, prompting the historian Kark Patrick to refer to the city as the "Varanasi of Nepal" in his writings, influenced by its impressive library (Adhikari, 2078, p. 52). With the Malla-era inscriptions being in Sanskrit, it is evident that the common people also had a good command of the language, indicative of the potential for library development (Adhikari, 2078, p. 54).

The renowned *Tripur Vidyapith* near *Bhaktapur's Sakothā* and *Karmāchārya* Āgam still preserves its legacy. In ancient times, it housed manuscripts on tantra, astrology, grammar, Puranas, Buddhist Vajrayana, Ayurveda, architecture, and iconography, written in scripts like Ranjana, Devanagari, and Newari. Unfortunately, these invaluable documents could not be preserved due to various reasons (based on conversations with tantric scholar Mrigendra Raj Subedi, priest of Bhaktapur Taleju Bhawani).

Through the study of ancient records, we learn that the feudal lords and ministers of the Licchavi period established numerous trusts (*guthis*) and commissioned stone inscriptions during rituals, victory celebrations, temple/monastery constructions, or any other auspicious activities (Joshi, 2077, p. 9). The stone inscription of King Pratap Malla at Hanuman Dhoka in Kantipur incorporates fourteen languages, including Roman and Urdu. It begins with the Sanskrit invocation "*Om Namah Shri Shri Shri Kalikayai*" paying homage to the goddess Kali (personal observation).

At the Hiranyvarna Mahavihar in Lalitpur, the Prajnaparamita Sutra, originally written in the Ranjana script with golden ink on blackened vellum during the Malla era, is still recited annually during the Shravan month (Gunla in the Nepal Era calendar). Each year, the ancient manuscript is re-inscribed onto new vellum using gold paint funded by the guthi institution (based on conversations with Asst. Prof. Shantaratna Bajracharya of Nepal Sanskrit University). The *Shantipura* Āgama of Swayambhu houses ancient palm-leaf manuscripts written in serpents' blood, with the belief that drying them under the sun can induce rainfall during droughts (based on conversations with Ashok Buddhacharya of Swayambhu).

Formal Beginnings of Libraries in Nepal

After the conquest of the Kathmandu Valley by the nation-builder His Majesty King Prithvi Narayan Shah (1779-1831 BS), royal documents from the erstwhile states of Gorkha, Nuwakot, Lalitpur, Bhaktapur, and others, as well as manuscripts from various monasteries, *viharas*, and āgamchhe*ns*, were compiled and housed at the Hanuman Dhoka Palace premises in Basantapur. This informal documentation of state records marked the unofficial inception of a library during Prithvi Narayan Shah's reign. Subsequently, his

grandson, the young King Girvan Yuddha Bikram Shah (1854-1873 BS), on Bhadra 15, 1869 BS (Shukrabar of Shasthi tithi), issued a royal decree called the *"Chitai Tahabil Adhininiyam"* to collect and consolidate all records from the repository and books available at the palace into a library (Adhikari, 2078, p. 54). The term *"Chitai"* means supervision, and *"Tahabil"* refers to the treasury box or collection of rupees from government offices (Brihat Nepali Shabdakosh).

From this date, the Nepali library sector gained its first legally recognized library. The decree appointed Pandit Kedarnath Jhā as the head librarian (*Tahabildar/Pustakalādhyaksha*) with an annual salary of 125 rupees and two assistants (*Tahluvas*). Their duties included daily worship (*nitya archana*), lighting evening lamps (*dhup batti*), protecting documents and books from insects and rodents, sun-drying damp books, and properly covering books with cloth. King Girvan Yuddha's issuance of this remarkable decree reveals his love for books (Adhikari, 2078, p. 54). Much later, in 1904 BS, Prime Minister Jang Bahadur Rana relocated all the books from the *Chitai Tahabil* at Hanuman Dhoka to the *Jaisi Kotha* at *Thapathali Durbar* and appointed Khadgaram Joshi as a *subba* (librarian) (Adhikari, 2078, p. 55).

Libraries in the Rana Era

In 1953 BS, during the reign of Maharaja Vir Shamsher (1909-1957 BS), all books and materials from the *Jaisi Kotha* at *Thapathali Durbar* were relocated to Durbar High School. Over time, it came to be known as the *Durbar Library*, where students, teachers, and staff of the high school would study. Due to the need for renovation of Durbar High School in 1957 BS, the library was shifted to a new building near *Ghanta Ghar* (Clock Tower) and renamed *Ghanta Ghar Library*. Later, when Dev Shamsher became the Prime Minister, he published a notice in the Gorkhapatra (Year 1, Issue 2), opening the library to the general public. In 1962 BS, its name was changed to *"Vir Library Sarkari Pustakhaana"* (Vir Library State Library), and the Prime Minister's permission became mandatory for studying there. The French historian Sylvain Levi visited and studied ancient books and records with special permission from Vir Shamsher, conducting in-depth research on Nepali history and culture. Vir Shamsher also invited Harprasad Shastri, a representative of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, to prepare a catalog of special manuscripts and books on Sanskrit literature, Puranas, Agamas, Ayurveda, Buddhist Tantra, and astrology.

In 1989 BS, during Bhim Shamsher's tenure as Prime Minister, the books were classified into *"Sanskrit Section"* and *"Bhote Section"* categories, and catalogs were prepared. The Sanskrit section included Hindu tantric texts in scripts like *Ranjana, Bhujimol, Kwemol, Lintumol, Golmol, Devanagari,* and *Prakrit*, while the Bhote section covered Buddhist *Vajrayana* tantric texts in the *Sambhota* script and *Newari* language. Chittaharsha Vajracharya classified and cataloged the Tibetan manuscripts and texts. This marked the gradual development of the library. Eventually, in 2009 BS, it came under the Department of Archaeology, and from Asoj 17, 2024 BS, the books from *Vir Library Sarkari Pustakhana* at *Ghanta Ghar* were relocated to the National Archives at Ramshah Path (Adhikari, 2078, pp. 55-56).

Indicator of National Consciousness

Libraries are the gateway to the development of national consciousness and serve as the primary indicator of progress in villages

and cities. The awareness or civilization of a nation is reflected in its libraries. The light of national consciousness or the mine of contemplation, the library is the lifeblood of a nation. When this lifeblood is healthy, it facilitates the country's development and the circulation of civilization. Therefore, it is imperative that intellectuals remain highly active in preserving this foundation. Whether identifying a research area or analyzing facts used in research, the library's indispensability remains. Its core reveals the pace of research. The outcome of research conducted at universities or research centers is reflected in these libraries. Apart from this, the library's role cannot be overlooked for other purposes as well (Smarika, 2077, p. 38).

The library is the primary center for research. In research tools, the first material is the field study of the area, and the second material is the library study. The library itself serves as the basis for analyzing the first source. Therefore, the library is the primary foundation for study and research. If this crucial foundation crumbles, research becomes obstructed. If the library falls into disrepair during the course of study, it will bring stagnation to the progress of human civilization. From the perspective of research, the heritage of human civilization has been lost and recreated in libraries. The library is the eye of research. When researchers sit in the library to conduct research, the library provides them with resources, and the achievements derived from the research pave the way for the highest point of economic, social, cultural, educational, and all other aspects, leading to prosperity. In this context, no conscious voice seems to have been raised about libraries (Smarika, 2077, p. 39).

The library is a center where the entire history of the past, identity and recognition, civilization and culture, and a comprehensive introduction to society are collected, comprising truths and facts. By utilizing these, readers can comprehend their reality. The library is not merely a repository of books but also a place for storing knowledge, developing skills, changing perceptions, and fostering social sentiments. The library is a place that educates people throughout their life cycle. Regardless of the purpose or objective for which a library is established, the core or periphery is imbued with social goodwill, educational advancement, and national development. This aspect of the library's purposefulness is eternal. The library breathes life into the triangular cyclical relationship between educational advancement, sustainable development, and nationalism (Smarika, 2077, p. 38).

The importance of libraries is evident for social, cultural, and multidimensional transformations. Without in-depth study, research, and conclusions, no transformation is possible, and without transformation, national development cannot occur. Personality development, civic awareness, information technology development, globalization, industrialization, educational and political changes, novel thoughts and traditions, among others, are determining factors of social transformation (Smarika, 2077, p. 61). Libraries play a crucial role in promoting such factors (p. 61). Social, cultural, and multidimensional transformations exemplify national progress. There is no doubt that the development and expansion of public libraries assist in achieving the global shared pursuit of development, adopted by the international community to attain prosperity in human life and maintain peace in society (Smarika, 2078, p. 43).

Libraries: Intergenerational Knowledge Transfer for Progress

Libraries embody the investment of generations of human beings. Due to this investment, humans have brought libraries to life, either in tangible or intangible forms, based on the utilization of their intellectual abilities. Therefore, the use of libraries in human life is intrinsically linked to a distinct civilization. The reflection of progress and the characteristic of philosophy are associated with human satisfaction. When this foundation crumbles, human civilization and intellectual activities deteriorate, hindering social advancement. The continuous utilization of human knowledge passed down through generations, the authenticity of tradition, and other factors have rendered the value of libraries immeasurable. In the 21st century, there are ample examples of discussions on the exchange of intercultural knowledge. Whether in management or scientific fields, the dissemination of knowledge holds a distinct significance. Individuals from diverse ethnicities, language groups, castes, genders, religions, and age groups transfer knowledge from one generation to the next. Elderly citizens can impart substantial knowledge about their culture, moral education, professions, and more to children. This, too, is a unique model of an intangible library.

The future pillars of the nation, children, can achieve life success through exploratory, research-based, and practical education. Consequently, children can acquire self-reliance and life skills, enabling them to become complete human beings. The current primary necessity is to develop libraries as centers for teaching and learning activities, providing quality education, offering exploratory, research-oriented, and practical education to students, and equipping them with the necessary information to become globally competitive. Therefore, the attention of all concerned parties must be focused on this endeavor.

Libraries for Cost-Effectiveness

In the market, only contemporary books reflecting the current context of a particular time are available. However, readers are often curious to know the circumstances of the past eras. Libraries, with their living collections, cater to such inquisitiveness. Libraries provide reference materials aligned with the researchers' needs, offering readers a sense of self-satisfaction. Libraries serve as an excellent alternative for researchers, ensuring the completeness of their research work and studies, though their significance is not limited to this aspect alone. Readers may not be able to purchase all the good and useful books available in the market. Libraries alleviate the financial burden on readers, enabling them to further broaden their horizons of knowledge (Smarika, 2077, p. 38).

As information resources are stored in diverse formats in libraries, and as people's needs evolve over time, libraries have been undergoing redefinition. Reflecting the changes in collections and services that have occurred over time, libraries are now being addressed by terms such as reading rooms, documentation centers, resource centers, archives, and more, depending on their subject areas and functions (Smarika, 2077, p. 38).

The concept of libraries has expanded beyond mere repositories of books. They have transformed into dynamic knowledge centers that cater to the diverse information needs of users in a cost-effective manner. By providing access to a wide range of resources, both current and historical, libraries enable readers to explore various contexts and expand their intellectual horizons without the financial burden of acquiring all the resources

individually.

E-resources and E-libraries

The reading culture is gradually shifting from books towards e-resources. Contemporary readers prefer to access and utilize resources using technology from their current locations, rather than physically visiting libraries to read books. The development of information and communication technology (ICT) has enabled the transformation of text materials from library collections into digital libraries, allowing readers worldwide to access and utilize them. Readers can now study and conduct research online without the need to physically visit libraries for the desired materials (Smarika, 2078, p. 37).

E-resources are diverse source materials published in digital formats facilitated by computer technology (Adhikari, 2078, p. 363). Examples include e-books, e-journals, e-magazines, online articles, online newspapers, dictionaries, encyclopedias, online theses and dissertations, online audiovisual materials, databases, and more (p. 363). Being in digital format, these materials can be conveniently read on screens, downloaded, and adjusted to any desired font or size. The instantaneous access to information within these resources, coupled with their updateability, facilitates verification and saves time (p. 364). Materials prepared through digital technology can be stored on computer servers, CDs, DVDs, external hard drives, or cloud storage. By hosting them on web servers, these materials can be made accessible online from anywhere in the world (Smarika, 2078, p. 37). The utilization of such a system aids in enhancing the effectiveness of services provided by libraries (p. 37). Although some libraries and archives in Nepal have digitized their text materials and established digital libraries, they have not yet made them available online (p. 37).

The concept of the e-library, facilitated by advancements in ICT, has transformed the way information resources are accessed and utilized. It allows for remote and convenient access to a wide range of digital materials, promoting efficient research, verification, and time management. However, in Nepal, while efforts have been made to digitize library collections, the online availability of these digital resources remains limited.

Challenges and Recommendations

In the backdrop of Nepal's transition to a federal democratic system, while all levels of government have played a significant role in managing libraries and their physical locations, the desired outcomes have not been achieved, posing challenges to the promotion of reading culture. Simultaneously, the lack of reader dynamism in libraries suggests a lack of attraction toward reading culture. In the global landscape, the rapid development of information technology, excessive use of social media, and society's inclination toward physical entertainment rather than perennial knowledge have emerged as challenges to the utilization of vibrant libraries. Even in digital libraries, concerns regarding data security and privacy have arisen.

To promote reading culture, time-relevant open-access digital library systems should be developed, and open educational resources (OERs) and free e-resources should be integrated into virtual or electronic library models. Additionally, the government should formulate policy reforms and corresponding programs to foster reading culture development. If stakeholders actively engage in initiatives that motivate the general public toward library usage, significant improvements in reading

culture can be achieved.

The challenges faced in library management and the promotion of reading culture in the federal context of Nepal are multifaceted. Firstly, despite efforts from various levels of government in managing libraries and their physical locations, the desired outcomes have not been realized, hindering the advancement of reading culture (Smarika, 2078, p. 37). Secondly, the apparent lack of reader dynamism in libraries suggests a deficiency in attracting people toward reading culture.

Furthermore, global trends such as the rapid development of information technology, the excessive use of social media, and society's inclination toward physical entertainment over perennial knowledge have emerged as formidable challenges to the utilization of vibrant libraries (Adhikari, 2078, p. 363). Even in the realm of digital libraries, concerns regarding data security and privacy have arisen, further compounding the challenges (p. 364).

To address these challenges and promote reading culture effectively, several measures can be undertaken. One approach is to develop time-relevant, open-access digital library systems that cater to the evolving needs of users. Additionally, integrating open educational resources (OERs) and free e-resources into virtual or electronic library models can enhance accessibility and engagement (Smarika, 2078, p. 37).

Moreover, policy reforms and corresponding programs initiated by the government are crucial for fostering the development of reading culture. Stakeholders should actively engage in initiatives that motivate the general public toward library usage, as such efforts can contribute significantly to improving reading culture (p. 37).

By implementing these measures and addressing the challenges holistically, ample opportunities exist to achieve substantial improvements in reading culture within the federal context of Nepal.

Conclusion

Preserving libraries, which shape the consciousness, transformation, and developmental trajectory of society, is the duty of individuals, communities, and the nation itself. Only by keeping the tradition of library utilization vibrant and promoting it across generations can an intellectually virtuous and morally upright community be nurtured. It is an indispensable prerequisite for the holistic development of the nation.

Libraries are the embodiment of a society's collective consciousness, serving as catalysts for its transformation and charting its developmental course. Their preservation is not merely an institutional responsibility but a moral imperative for individuals, communities, and the nation as a whole. The library is the gateway to the development of national consciousness and serves as the primary indicator of progress in villages and cities.

The continuity of the library tradition across generations is pivotal in fostering an intellectually enlightened and morally grounded society. By encouraging a culture of library usage and instilling a reverence for knowledge from a young age, a foundation is laid for the creation of a virtuous and intellectually capable populace. Adhikari (2078) emphasizes this notion, stating, "The future pillars of the nation, children, can achieve life success through exploratory, research-based, and practical education" (p. 363), which libraries facilitate.

Ultimately, the preservation and promotion of libraries are inextricably linked to the holistic development of the nation. As repositories of knowledge, cultural heritage, and societal values, they shape the collective consciousness and aspirations of a people. It is a moral imperative for all stakeholders – individuals, communities, and governing bodies – to recognize the pivotal role of libraries and take concerted efforts to sustain and revitalize this invaluable tradition.

In conclusion, the preservation of libraries and the cultivation of a library-centric culture are not mere institutional pursuits but sacred duties that ensure the moral, intellectual, and developmental well-being of society and the nation as a whole.

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